

**February 17, 2011**

**Commission on Bullying Prevention**

**February 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Western New England College School of Law's Moot Court Room**

**Comments by Shannon Whalen, Ed.D.**

Good morning,

My name is Shannon Whalen. I am a resident of Springfield, MA. I have 3 children in elementary school in Springfield. I am a professor at Springfield College.

I am here today to support bullying legislation, but also to voice my disappointment in the Commonwealth. Across the Commonwealth our students are failing at anti-violence behaviors. South Hadley just happened to have their tragedy make national news. Parents and children from all over the state, some of them in this very room can attest to bullying and violence in their schools as well.

Let's compare violence prevention skills to literacy skills. When standardized tests indicated that our students were performing poorly in literacy on the MCAST, why didn't the legislature just pass a law requiring all students to read and write at or above grade level? Obviously that would not work. Instead, the parents, schools and communities devoted more instructional time to reading and writing. So why when we are discussing violence prevention does the legislature believe that enacting laws making bullying illegal will somehow change the behavior of our children? Correct me if I am wrong, but isn't there a law that makes speeding illegal? I am sure there are those in this room that have broken speeding laws – maybe some of you on the Commission!

Laws are a necessary and important part of society, however, laws do not work alone. In order to help students achieve literacy skills parents promote literacy at home by reading to their children and singing the ABC's, communities fund libraries, and students take English/Language Arts every day of every year Kindergarten through 12th grade.

I am wondering why the Commonwealth seems to believe that bullying prevention laws and school policies will somehow cure the problem of bullying. I am wondering why I have heard no discussion of increasing instructional

time in health education. Certified health education teachers instruct students in health promotion and risk reduction. I am not talking about physical education teachers, science teachers, computer teachers or Latin teachers who teach health. I am talking about people who major in health education, teachers who specialize in working with children to improve decision making, refusal skills and social skills, teachers who take courses on violence prevention, and interpersonal communication. Just like when students fail at reading and writing we devote more time to language arts class, when students fail at pro-social skills they need more health education classes.

Massachusetts has a rich history for many reasons, but the Commonwealth is also the first state in the nation to require school health education. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Dr. William Alcott, and Horace Mann, both from Massachusetts, advocated tirelessly for health to be taught in elementary school. Lemuel Shattuck in the famous document, Report of the Sanitary Commission of Massachusetts, stated:

*“Every child should be taught, early in life, that to preserve his own life and his own health and the lives and health of others, is one of his most important and abiding duties...This matter has been too little regarded in the education of the young.”*

One hundred years later Massachusetts is no longer a leader in school health education. In MA there is no state requirement for comprehensive school health education. School districts choose how and when to implement health education. Many school districts employ physical education teachers to teach health. In my work at Springfield College I came across a school district that had a computer teacher teaching health, and another school district that had a Latin teacher teaching health. Can you imagine a school district employing a non-certified, non-credentialed teacher for math or language arts?

In May of 2007, before the deaths of Carl Walker-Hoover and Phoebe Prince, I spoke on Capitol Hill in favor of (SB 288, HB 597) An Act Providing Comprehensive Health Education in Schools. Four years later I am standing here still advocating for the same thing. I am requesting that when addressing the issue of bullying and school violence, in addition to bullying laws and school policies, that the Commonwealth consider requiring comprehensive school health education K-12, and require that health education be taught by credentialed, qualified, certified health education teachers.

Thank you for your time.

# About Shannon Whalen

## Brief Biography

Dr. Shannon Whalen is a Professor in the School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation at Springfield College. She received her baccalaureate degree in health and physical education from the University of Delaware, her first Masters degree in health education from New York University, and her second Masters and Doctorate of Education degrees in health education from Columbia University, Teachers College. Prior to joining the faculty at Springfield College, Dr. Whalen taught health, physical education, and athletic training courses at Adelphi University, The College of Mount Saint Vincent and John Jay College, CUNY. Dr. Whalen has also worked as a health teacher in the Clarkstown Central School District and the Yonkers Public School System and has served as an adjunct lecturer in the Department of Health and Behavior Studies at Columbia University, Teachers College. She serves as a consultant for many private and public health organizations and is currently working as an advocate for health education on state and national committees. She served on the New York State Goals 2000 Higher Education committee and she was a member of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards Health Standards Committee. She presents health education workshops at many conferences each year and has been publishing her writing and research efforts in health education journals and textbooks. Her most recent publication efforts include a high school health education textbook, a health education and physical education technology integration textbook and a book of secondary teaching techniques. Dr. Whalen's areas of expertise are school health, technology integration, women's health, HIV/AIDS, and human sexuality education. Her current research efforts are focused on technology and health, health education pedagogy and advocacy for health education, both on collegiate campuses and in the public schools.